

**ASSESSMENT OF ACCESS AND UTILIZATION OF ARABIC AND AJAMI
MANUSCRIPTS AMONG HISTORY SCHOLARS IN AHMADU BELLO
UNIVERSITY, ZARIA**

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ABSTRACT

This paper assesses how history scholars in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria access and utilize Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources, using the theoretical paradigm of information perspective. The paper examined the objectives of teaching history in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. A brief history of the Department was captured, its structures and development. Arabic and Ajami manuscripts are described as handwritten documents containing information on history, education, literature, astronomy, medicine, culture, communication and natural sciences. These manuscripts are record in Arabic and in any other language using Arabic characters, such as Hausa, Fulfulde, Kanuri, Nupe, and Yoruba. The findings of the study show that scholars accessr -. and use the manuscripts with the aid of magnifying glasses and translation. The paper concludes with recommendations that the provision of more funds for that management and acquisition of the resources is worthwhile.

INTRODUCTION

The primary objectives of teaching history in the Department of History of Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria is to give the students thorough grasp of Nigerian history with emphasis on African history, historiography and historical movement of the world.

According to the undergraduate students' prospectus (2006/2007), the purpose of history teaching programme in Ahmadu Bello University is to make the students comprehend the historical forces and developments which have shaped and is reshaping lives of the people of Nigeria, Africa and the rest of

the world. At the same time to develop the students' interest to the commitment and capacity consciousness that would enable them to relate to these forces and developments in ways which would foster Nigerian and African unity and independence.

To achieve these objectives there must be relevant teaching and learning resources. The Arabic and Ajami manuscripts are information resources that document a great deal of historical antecedence, ideas and culture of the people specifically of Northern Nigeria and other African countries. The contents cover areas of human activity, for example, logic, mathematics, religion, politics, law, astronomy, medicine, natural sciences and literature; making them invaluable sources that contain the heritage of the area where they were formed. In line with this, Dogara (2011) asserted that the Arabic Ajami manuscripts in Northern Nigeria have provided the written testimony to the skills of African scientists in the field of mathematics, medicine, climatology, archaeology and general scholarship in the middle ages. These resources are instrumental to teaching history in Universities and other tertiary Institutions.

The recognition of their importance and contributions necessitated the establishment of the Northern History Research Scheme (NHRS) in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The objective of the scheme was designed to collect and preserve primary source of the history of the people of northern Nigeria particularly those written in Arabic and Ajami. Bello (2009) reported that the establishment of the project (NHRS) was by a number of considerations relating to the state of knowledge and history of northern Nigeria, and West

Africa as well as that of the states and societies of western Sudan in particular. The scheme is at present attached to the department of history in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Arabic manuscripts are documents and record or inscribed information using Arabic language and its characters. While the Ajami manuscripts are those documents that recorded information or inscribed it using Arabic characters to write and express ideas in any language apart from Arabic which is popular and used to express thought and ideas in Hausa, Fulfulde, Kanuri, Nupe and Yoruba.

History Department

The Department of History of Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, is one of the Departments that made up the Faculty of Art in the University. The department was established in 1962, the same year the University was founded; it is one of the pioneering academic departments in the University. Late Professor Abdullahi Smith was the founding Head of Department. At the beginning the degree programme was combined honors, where students were required to take only three subjects throughout their three year study programme. Undergraduate Student Prospectus (2006/2007).

As a result of increase in admission rate in 1966 the degree programme was expanded to single and combined honors. Then the combined honors at that time could be with any discipline in the faculty. According to students' handbook (2006/2007) in the early 1970s, the combined honors degree was restricted to included History and Government and later History/Political Science. In 1978, Archaeology unit was established as a subdivision within the

department, offering single and combined honors degree in Archaeology and History/Archaeology respectively.

At present, the department is made up of two units, History and Northern History Research Scheme (NHRS), a research unit with primary objective of identifying, collecting and preserving Arabic and Ajami manuscripts dealing with the general history of pre-colonial Northern Nigeria and beyond.

Arabic and Ajami Manuscript Resources

Arabic and Ajami manuscripts constitute an important aspect of the intellectual heritage of the people of northern Nigeria and beyond. These documents are regarded as a piece of handwritten information which could be in a form of a book, pamphlet, letter, poem, poetry and other formats that are not published.

Auyo and Mohammed (2009) described the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts on the basis of their content and value in administration, law, scholarship, historical construction and cultural preservation.

Batiste (2007) in her contribution described the resources as veritable body of knowledge which can be sustainably explored for the benefit of present and future generations of humanity. Dogara (2011) reported that in the northern and southern parts of Nigeria a lot of literature written in Hausa, Kanuri, Fulfulde, Nupe, Etsako and Yoruba languages domesticated Arabic characters.

Arabic and Ajami manuscripts are usually private collections that can be found also in repository in Northern Nigeria. Northern History Research Scheme in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, National Archives Kaduna,

National Museum Jos, Centres and Libraries in some of the Universities in the country, States Bureau for Art and Culture are rich and entrusted with the collection, preservation, storage, retrieval and access to the material in Nigeria.

Objective of the Study

The aim of this paper is built on the understanding that information is the most important element for progress in society. As well access to it and its utilization are great and ultimate towards a better decision making. It is upon this that the paper's broad objective is set to assess how history scholars in Ahmadu Bello University access and use Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources. The specific objectives of the paper are:

1. To find out methods adopted by libraries and repositories to grant access to Arabic and Ajami documents to patrons.
2. To find out how history scholars in Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, use Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources.
3. To find out the libraries and repositories where History scholars consult Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in the University.
4. To find out the level of satisfaction to the services rendered by libraries and repository managing Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources to the History scholars.
5. To find out the problems inhibiting History scholars from having easy access to the Arabic and Ajami manuscript

Scope

The scope of this paper is only the scholars of History in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. By this it means that other scholars such as the Linguists, archaeologists, political scientists,

sociologists, etc are excluded from the study. The population of the study consists of 22 history scholars of the University.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Fudi (2004) in a study on the problems facing the use of manuscripts in Nigerian libraries reported that most of the libraries managing the Arabic manuscripts in Nigeria are having the problem of inadequate management, conservation and professional staff in the libraries to manage the resources. This invariably affect access and utilization of such manuscripts.

Yaqub *et al.* (2013) conducted a study on the management and use of Arabic and Islamic Manuscripts in Nigerian Universities: A Case Study of Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan. Here the study focused on the adequacy, management, use and factual condition of the collection of Arabic and Islamic materials in the library. The study identified that the Arabic and Islamic manuscripts are sufficiently available at the library and are accessed by the students and researchers. The challenges identified to be related to the management and use of the resources in the University. The challenges include poor conservation and preservation of the manuscripts and inadequacy of professional staff to man the Arabic Islamic section of the library. Other challenges are inadequate seating spaces for users, irregular power supply.

In their study Auyo and Ahmed (2011) on the prevalence of Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in Northern Nigeria implications for access, use and enduring management as a framework for research. The study argued that in order to ensure access and use and as

well as enduring management, there is the need for empirical determination of the existence of the resources, their types, subjects coverage, locations and ownership.

In a nutshell, this study is wholly on the access and use of Arabic and Ajami manuscripts among a group of scholars in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The scholars are consulting the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in their area of specialization. As described by Yaqub (2013), Arabic language has been a vehicle of influencing the culture and history of many nations. Mahmud (1964) claimed that Arabic and Islamic manuscripts collections contain a vast literature on a number of topics like theology, politics, law, education, applied sciences, medicine recreational arts, crafts and a host of others.

METHODOLOGY

The paper employ questionnaire for gathering data. The data derived from the research were quantified and analyzed using frequency count, percentage tables and discussion for each of the objective of the study.

REPORT ON THE FINDINGS

Method adopted in accessing Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources by History scholars in A.B.U., Zaria.

Access to information resources by users is determined by the library or the repository of information resources. It is imperative for these institutions to provide easy access to their resources for users. The study reported that all the libraries and repository managing Arabic and Ajami Manuscript in Ahmadu Bello University are providing open access to users of the resources.

**Use of Arabic and Ajami Manuscript
by History scholars in A.B.U Zaria.**

Table 1 present the methods on how History scholars are using Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in A.B.U., Zaria.

Table 1: Methods used in facilitating the use of Arabic and Ajami manuscripts

Methods	Freq.	%
Translators	12	63
Magnifying Glass	4	21
No Response	3	16
Total	19	100

The study shows that 12 (63%) of History scholars in Ahmadu Bello University use translator to access the resources while 4 (12%) use magnifying glass. The study shows that the scholars are employing the assistance or services of translators in facilitating the use of the documents. However, the translators are said to be colleagues from Arabic Department of the University and others that are versed in Arabic language within the University community. This shows that there is a tradition of collaboration in using Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria among the History scholars and linguists in Arabic.

The Libraries and Repositories where History Scholars Consult Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in ABU, Zaria

Table 2: Libraries and repositories where History Scholars consult Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in A.B.U., Zaria

Library/Repository	Freq.	%
Arewa House	5	26
Centre for Islamic Legal Studies, A.B.U., Zaria	2	11
Northern History Research and Scheme ABU, Zaria	12	63
Kashim Ibrahim Library A.B.U, Zaria	0	0
Total	19	100

Table 2 present where Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources are available and patronized by History scholars in A.B.U., Zaria. History scholars consult Arabic and Ajami manuscript resources in Northern History Research Scheme A.B.U., Zaria, with 12(63%) and the highest among others. The reason for this might be associated with the fact that the repository is attached to the History Department. Arewa House Centre for Historical Documentation and Research has 5(26%) of the total respondents, while Centre for Islamic Legislature has 2(11%).

The level of satisfaction by the History scholars with the services offered by the Libraries and Repositories managing Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in A.B.U., Zaria.

Table 3 present the level of satisfaction with the services offered by the Libraries and Repositories of Arabic and Ajami manuscript in A.B.U, Zaria.

Table 3: The level of satisfaction with the services of libraries and repository in A.B.U, Zaria.

Satisfaction	Freq.	%
Very Satisfied	3	16
Satisfied	4	21
Not Satisfied	7	37
No Response	5	26
Total	19	100

The table revealed the level of satisfaction of the History Scholars in A.B.U., Zaria with the services offered to them by the Libraries and Repositories managing Arabic and Ajami manuscript in the University. The study shows that the Scholars are not satisfied with Libraries and Repositories services with 7(37%), those that are very satisfied are 3 (16%) and those that indicated satisfied only are 4 (21%). Conspicuously, the analysis is showing that the scholars are not fully satisfied with the services offered by the centres with respect to Arabic and manuscripts.

Factors inhibiting the history scholars from easy access to the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts in ABU Zaria.

One of the major factors that is inhibiting easy access to the resources by history scholars is that majority of the scholars cannot read Arabic, that is why even when they go through the catalogue they cannot get what they want. As a result of this, they resort to imploring the services of translator and also it was observed that most of the staff (librarians) managing the Arabic and Ajami resources in the centres cannot read or write Arabic not to talk of with their users efficiently.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of this study, we can understand that the Arabic and Ajami resources despite the fact that they are written in Arabic language are consulted by scholars that cannot read or write Arabic, because of the relevance of the resources in their field of endeavor.

It can also be seen from the study that Ahmadu Bello University is very rich in Arabic and Ajami manuscripts, considering the number of the libraries and repositories managing the resources in the University. But, unfortunately despite the enormous subject areas or field covered in the resources delve into, only very few academics as a result of language barrier.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the findings from the study and the importance attached to Arabic and Ajami manuscript in teaching history, the following recommendations were made:

1. The libraries and repositories in the University should exploit the benefit brought about by information and communication technology (ICT) to improve and enhance its services delivery.
2. The libraries and repositories managing Arabic and Ajami manuscripts should collaborate with the linguistics in Arabic, English and Hausa to the translation of these resources for easy use.
3. The libraries and the repositories should have a uniform catalogue of the Arabic and Ajami manuscripts resources for easy access of the resources.
4. It is advised that the libraries and repositories managing Arabic and Ajami manuscript should go online so that the resources can be addressed globally.

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